

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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O R 121548Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9633
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 5313

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI PINS PINT LE IS SY
SUBJ: SITUATION IN LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH KAMEL AL ASSAD

1. CALLED ON KAMEL ASSAD, SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT, SEPTEMBER 12, AT HIS REQUEST. HE WANTED TO REVIEW SITUATION IN LEBANON AND THE AREA, TO ASK ABOUT PROBABLE OUTCOME OF CAMP DAVID AND ITS IMPACT ON LEBANON, AND TO EXPRESS CONCERN ABOUT THE SOUTH.

2. I SAID IT WAS NOT CLEAR WHEN CAMP DAVID MEETING WOULD BE FINISHED, BUT I EXPECTED IT WOULD BE IN A FEW DAYS. I THOUGHT HE COULD REST ASSURED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO BILATERAL PEACE SETTLEMENT ISSUING FROM IT, BUT THERE WAS POSSIBILITY OF AGREEMENT ON PRINCIPLES WHICH WOULD BE BASIS FOR FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE PARTIES, NEGOTIATIONS WHICH WE HOPED WOULD EVENTUALLY BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE OTHER ARAB STATES.

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3. WITH REGARD TO SITUATION IN THE SOUTH I WAS PLEASED TO NOTE THAT THERE HAD BEEN REAL IMPROVEMENT IN SECURITY AND SOME RETURN TO NORMAL LIFE. DIFFICULT PROBLEMS REMAINED, NOTABLY THOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN ENCLAVES AND THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE BETWEEN THE TWO RIVERS, BUT UNIFIL WAS MAKING STEADY PROGRESS, AND I THOUGHT THERE WAS HOPE FOR

THE FUTURE.

4. WITH REGARD TO THE SITUATION IN NORTHERN PART OF COUNTRY, IT WAS MY PERSONAL CONVICTION THAT WE WERE NOT GOING TO HAVE PEACE AND QUIET UNTIL THERE WAS A DISENGAGEMENT BETWEEN SYRIANS AND MARONITES. IT WAS ALSO MY BELIEF THAT THE ONLY WAY THIS COULD BE ATTAINED WAS BY STATIONING LEBANESE ARMY IN BEIRUT AND LETTING IT TAKE OVER THE SECURITY TASKS NOW BEING PERFORMED BY SYRIANS. PRIME MINISTER HAD TOLD ME THAT PASSAGE OF NEW ARMY LAW WAS ESSENTIAL FIRST STEP TO ENTRY OF ARMY INTO BEIRUT AND HAD SEEMED RATHER OPTIMISTIC ABOUT PASSAGE, PARTICULARLY GIVEN SUPPORT WHICH ASSAD HIMSELF WAS GIVING TO IT. MY QUESTION WAS WHETHER THE SITUATION WOULD STAND STILL THAT LONG. WE THOUGHT PRESENT CONJUNCTURE VERY DANGEROUS AND WERE CONCERNED THAT WIDE SCALE FIGHTING MIGHT BREAK OUT AND THAT ISRAELIS WOULD FEEL OBLIGED TO INTERVENE IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. THIS WAS WHAT USG HAD MEANT BY ITS STATEMENTS OF CONCERN ABOUT SITUATION.

5. ASSAD SAID QUESTION OF ENTRY OF ARMY INTO BEIRUT WAS VERY COMPLICATED. LEBANON COULD NOT SIMPLY TELL SYRIANS TO LEAVE ABRUPTLY. THERE HAD
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TO BE AN UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THEM. THIS WAS DIFFICULT IN THE CURRENT CLIMATE IN WHICH EVERYTHING WAS BEING GIVEN A CONFESSIONAL CAST. WHATEVER GOVERNMENT SAID OR DID WAS JUDGED IN CONFESSIONAL LIGHT. GOVERNMENT ITSELF HAD NOT BEEN AS ACTIVE AS IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN. HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT BOUTROS AND SARKIS WERE TELLING ME BUT GOVERNMENT SHOULD TAKE DECISION AS TO WHAT IT WANTED TO DO ABOUT ADF. HE HAD BEEN SHOCKED THAT SALIM AL HOSS HAD SPOKEN OUT ON NEED FOR RENEWAL, WHILE THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ARAB LEAGUE REPORTED BOUTROS HAD ASKED THAT NO ACTION BE TAKEN FOR THE TIME BEING. LET THE GOVERNMENT MAKE A DECISION EVEN IF IT WAS A MISTAKE. CONTINUED UNCERTAINTY AS TO ITS INTENTIONS WAS DESTABILIZING. PEOPLE NEEDED SIGNS OF POSITIVE LEADERSHIP. HE EMPHASIZED IMPORTANCE OF UNITED STATES DOING EVERYTHING IT COULD WITH CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP AND IN DAMASCUS AND JERUSALEM, IN PARTICULAR, TO TRY TO COUNSEL RESTRAINT.

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 5313

EXDIS

6. WITH REGARD TO SOUTH, ASSAD SAID PROBLEM WAS MORE THAN SIMPLE SECURITY FOR ITS INHABITANTS, ALTHOUGH THAT WAS OF COURSE IMPORTANT. PROBLEM WAS FUTURE OF THE REGION. HE WAS CONCERNED THAT PASSAGE OF TIME AND LACK OF RESOLUTION OF PROBLEM WOULD GIVE SANCTION OF LEGALITY TO PALESTINIAN PRESENCE AND TO ANOMALOUS STATUS OF ENCLAVES. HE SUSPECTED PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS WERE MAKING COMMON CAUSE BECAUSE ISRAELIS WANTED PALESTINIAN STATE TO BE ESTABLISHED IN SOUTH LEBANON RATHER THAN ON WEST BANK. IT ALSO APPEARED TO HIM THAT ISRAELIS WANTED TO KEEP BUFFER ZONE ALONG SOUTH BORDER UNDER THEIR AEGIS. THIS WAS PART OF PARTITION PLAN UNDER WHICH SHI'A WOULD BE CRUSHED BETWEEN UPPER AND NETHER MILL STONES OF SUNNIS AND PALESTINIANS ON ONE HAND AND ISRAELIS AND SYRIANS ON THE OTHER.

7. I SAID THAT WITH REGARD TO BEIRUT WE HAD BEEN ACTIVE WITH ALL THREE PARTIES HE HAD MENTIONED. THIS
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PROBLEM WAS BEING FOLLOWED AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. THE LEBANESE FRONT

LEADERSHIP, HOWEVER, CONSIDERED US TO BE PRO-SYRIAN WHILE THE SYRIANS WERE ACCUSING US OF BEING PRO-MARONITE. WE HAD BEEN VERY ACTIVE WITH THE ISRAELIS AS WELL, COUNSELING THEM ON THE IMPORTANCE OF NOT BEING SUCKED IN. WE THOUGHT THESE REPRESENTATIONS HAD HAD SOME EFFECT AND BELIEVED THAT MANY OF THE STORIES BEING CIRCULATED ABOUT ISRAELI SUPPORT FOR THE MARONITES WERE IN FACT PROPAGANDA FROM MARONITE EXTREMISTS TRYING TO PUFF UP THEIR SUPPORTERS. AS FOR THE SYRIANS, THEY ALWAYS RESPONDED THAT THEY WERE HERE IN SUPPORT OF LEGITIMACY AND ACTING IN SELF-DEFENSE. IT SEEMED TO ME THAT MISSING ELEMENT IN FORMULA WAS ACTION BY GOL TO CLARIFY POSITION WITH SYRIANS. I HOPED PRESIDENT SARKIS WOULD SIT DOWN WITH PRESIDENT ASSAD AND REACH AN AGREEMENT WITH HIM ON THE ROLE OF SYRIAN MILITARY IN THIS COUNTRY. WHILE WE WOULD CONTINUE TO MAKE DEMARCHES IN THE NAME OF HUMANITY AND POLITICAL EFFICIENCY, IMPACT OF OUR REPRESENTATIONS WAS WEAKENED BY FACT THAT THEY WERE NOT PARALLELED BY LEBANESE REPRESENTATION.

8. WITH REGARD TO SOUTH I SAID I COULD ASSURE HIM THAT WE AND THE UNITED NATIONS WERE VERY ALERT TO THE RISK OF GIVING OFFICIAL RECOGNITION TO THE ANOMALOUS REGIME IN THE ENCLAVES. WE REMAINED FULLY COMMITTED TO THE RESTORATION OF LEBANON'S SOVEREIGNTY THERE. AT THIS POINT THE PRINCIPAL INSTRUMENT FOR THAT WOULD HAVE TO BE UNIFIL, BUT WE HOPED IT WOULD PROVE POSSIBLE IN THE NOT TOO SECRET

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DISTANT FUTURE TO HAVE A LEBANESE ARMY PRESENCE IN THAT AREA. WE ALSO WERE KEENLY AWARE OF PROBLEM IMPOSED BY PRESENCE OF PALESTINIAN ENCLAVES BETWEEN THE AWWALI AND THE LITANI. THAT, HOWEVER, WAS A PROBLEM LINKED WITH THE OVERALL PALESTINIAN ONE AND I FRANKLY DID NOT HAVE ANY SOLUTION TO OFFER AT THIS POINT. WE PARTED ON THAT NOTE.

9. COMMENT: ASSAD IN ASKING ME TO COME TO SEE HIM WAS REMINDING ME OF HIS PRESENCE. WHILE HIS ABILITY TO INFLUENCE EVENTS IS LIMITED, WE SHOULD KEEP HIM IN MIND AND HE SHOULD BE SEEN REGULARLY. ALTHOUGH HIS PERSONAL LIFE IS FAR FROM BLAMELESS, HE IS A MODERATE AND A POTENTIAL INFLUENCE FOR STABILITY AMONG THE SHI'A.
PARKER

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